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ABSTRACT

Oral history has not been widely used in required high school history courses. Time, money, transcribing interviews, lack of teaching manuals, and the difficulties in evaluating students were cited as problems associated with using oral history as an instructional tool. Yet oral history projects do not have to be major productions to be successful. Research indicates that oral history may result in greater cognitive gain than traditional methods of teaching. Students are motivated and gain confidence by working on oral history projects. Those previously not interested in history find the subject exciting and meaningful after participating in an oral history project. Using oral history not only includes minorities, but alleviates prejudice against them by exposing students to a greater number of positive minority role models. A 29-item annotated bibliography about oral history and its use in the classroom forms the core of the paper, which concludes with six recommendations concerning research and teacher training in the area of oral history as well as the use of that technique in the classroom. (JB)

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ORAL HISTORY IN SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES

BY

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INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Adults have often said: "I think history is fascinating, but I sure was bored with it in high school!" Many people have seen little, if any, connection between school and real life.

Oral history is one way to bridge this gap and make the study of history meaningful for students. In many families both parents work and adolescents have busier schedules so it is not too surprising that most students have never sat down and listened to members of their family tell stories about their past (Kachaturoff & Greenebaum, 1981, p. 21).

When teachers hear students say that, before being required to conduct an oral history interview, they never heard their fathers talk about their experience in the Vietnam War, for example, it is easy to instinctually continue to make oral history assignments. Teachers who are not experienced with oral history, however, need an impetus to use it in the first place. The purpose of this paper was to convince teachers to experiment with, and to incorporate, oral history as an effective means to teach history in required high school courses. The intention of this study was not to analyze passive vs. active behavior in the classroom, nor to review oral history in the elementary, middle school, college, or graduate level.

Oral history, "A record of historical events that [was] obtained via first-hand interviews with persons usually of some prominence" (The Facts On File Dictionary Of Education, 1988, p. 331), has not just been used in social studies classes. One successful high school oral history project was the Foxfire publication produced by students in Eliot Wigginton's English classes. This book series focused on rural traditions in Southern Appalachia (The Facts On File Dictionary Of Education, 1988, p. 203). Class time required for oral history in the secondary school varied from very little to entire courses devoted to such projects. Final products in written form required students to transcribe interviews. This process involved making a written copy (usually a typewritten copy) of spoken material (The Random House Dictionary Of The English Language, 1987) obtained from interviews.

PEDAGOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF ORAL HISTORY

Up to 1984 cognitive development and learning theory were basically absent from literature dealing with oral history (Pierce, 1984, p.7) and teachers who had used oral history in the classroom did so despite a lack of research in this area (Neuenschwander, 1976, p.7).

William Fernekes brought the need for research to the attention of the academic community in 1983. He emphasized that oral history was "believed to contribute to the development of cognitive skills," though research regarding the pedagogical use of oral history had yet to substantiate this claim (p. 20).

Barry Lanman (1987) researched the use of oral history as an instructional tool for classroom use (p. 124). Data from his research indicated a greater cognitive gain for students instructed in oral history over students instructed by traditional methods, a statistical difference of .05 (Lanman, 1987, p. 128). Based on these findings he cautiously claimed that "...oral history instruction may provide some cognitive advantages over the traditional style of instructing U.S. History" (p.129). Regardless of the fact that more research was needed in this area, Lanman's findings were optimistic.

In addition to research in the cognitive effects of oral history projects, observational and testimonial literature attested to benefits in the affective domain. Students seemed motivated by oral history because the learning experience was "...meaningful, memorable, and valuable" (Kachaturoff & Greenebaum, 1981, p. 21). The potential for oral history to be "creative, rewarding, and effective instruction" (Lanman, 1987, p. 134) seemed to be

related to students' perception that learning was "more fun" when they were active rather than passive (Mehaffy, et al., 1979, p. 1).

Furthermore, heightened motivation and confidence may be attributed to oral history because direct application of learning engaged students in "real work" with a "real goal" (Hamlen, 1986, p.24-25).

Lanman also found that students favored oral history because it involved a project with a "real purpose." For example, students considered producing a magazine or obtaining stories as a concrete goal. Students reported this change of pace allowed them to contribute creatively. After completing oral history assignments, students reported history seemed "more believable" (Lanman, 1987, p. 130).

In addition, Kenneth Doka's research on adolescent attitudes and beliefs toward the elderly indicated that oral history projects resulted in increased student motivation (Doka, 1985-1986, p.183). Students also reported that they gained a "heightened understanding of the elderly" (Fernekes, 1983, p.4) and stereotypes and prejudices against the elderly were broken down (Hamlen, 1986, p.24) through intergenerational contact.

Furthermore, the sheer fact of exposure to the variety

of people in a community was an effective learning experience. In an oral history project at Jamaica Plain High School in Boston, Bard Hamlen (1986) reported it was "instructive" for his students to see a black graduate of the school serving as a dean at a prestigious university (p. 23).

A further consideration in instituting oral history projects was that some researchers complained that, for example, the lives of Hispanic, black, Asian-American, and American Indian women have not been given equal treatment in the study of U.S. history. Numerous articles mentioned that oral history was a way to include these "forgotten people" (Pierce, 1984, p. 9). Oral history was used to combat the prejudice against women of color in U.S. history (Winkler, 1986, p. 6). Students assigned to interview minorities about their experience learned history not included in their textbooks.

Several researchers have argued that studying this "underside of history" (Fernekes, 1983, p. 4&5) was especially important because only "lily-white" history has been recorded in most communities (Mehaffy, et al., 1979, p. 4&5), indicating that the "have nots" of society have not had "their stories told" (Nelson & Singleton, 1975, p.89).

APPLICATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Many teachers did not routinely assign oral history projects. William Fernekes (1983) speculated that the reason he received a low rate of return from a survey on the use of oral history in secondary schools might have been because schools didn't have the money for projects or they weren't offering special courses in oral history instruction (p. 11). The oral history project at Jamaica Plain High School in Boston was funded by a $3,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Hamlen, 1986, p. 26). The well known Foxfire books produced by students in Rabun Gap, Georgia were financed by Doubleday's paperback division, Anchor Books (Wigginton, 1985, p. 122). Money from Title IV C and the Indiana Department of Education made it possible for students in Elkhart, Indiana to be taken out of class on a rotating basis to work on an oral history project entitled "Project Links" (Rueff, 1989, personal interview). The most frequently cited reasons for not using oral history were inadequate funding and time necessary for projects (Neuenschwander, et al., 1975, p. 61). Yet not all oral history projects need to be major undertakings and it was reported that most successful efforts were not large (Mehaffy, et al., 1979, p. 2).

Other reasons for the absence of oral history in

required courses may be that many articles did not address implementation of oral history procedures and the subject of how to evaluate students was rarely mentioned in literature (Pierce, 1984, p.4). Also, most teachers did not have "how to do it" manuals for oral histroy (Fernekes, 1983, p. 14).

A major hurdle for including oral history projects in required classes was the time involved in transcribing taped interviews. Teachers disliked the transcription process, yet almost all high school oral history projects involved this procedure (Fernekes, 1983, p. 15 & 16). This time consuming chore was considered "necessary" by some even though it was also referred to as "the most difficult dimension of oral history projects" (Mehaffy, et al., 1979, p. 2). Students transcribing tapes faced the difficulty of choosing between a phonetic manner or a free, non-dialect transcription (Martin, 1985, p. 126). Students in one oral history project commented that some of the interest of events related "was lost" in transcription (Nelson & Singleton, 1975, p. 93). Tapes do not have to be transcribed, however. Fernekes (1983) recommended that judgements about transcription, editing, and indexing be based on whether or not the process contributed to intended learning objectives (p. 32).

A 1974 survey indicated that most teachers who did use oral history in social studies classes did not use it in

general U.S. History courses (Neuenschwander, 1975, p. 60). Furthermore, most instructors who used oral history devoted at least one quarter of classroom time instructing students in interview and transcription skills (Fernekes, 1983, p. 13). Yet teachers who have tried using oral history have continued using it as an instructional technique (Fernekes, 1983, p. 12) for reasons cited above (see Pedagogical Contributions Of Oral History).

Barry Lanman (1987) warned that, in order to be effective, oral history needed to be combined with other techniques for high school students (p. 134). A RAMP (Records and Archives Management Program) study on oral history cautioned that improper use of oral history was destructive (Moss & Mazikana, 1986, p. 10). Because memories faded and subjects exaggerated (Fernekes, 1983, p. 22) an exclusive use of oral history would be misleading.

ANNOTATIONS

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ORAL HISTORY

Moss, William W., and Peter C. Mazikana. "Archives, Oral History And Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study." Resources In Eduction, January, 1986. ED 272 215

This lengthy document (109 pages) presented by the Records and Archives Management Program (RAMP) was clearly intended for professional historians. The authors traced the history of oral history from 1122 B.C. to the 1980's. The legitimacy of oral history, the role of the archivist, the preservation and editing of tapes, libel, slander, and national security questions were among the issues treated. Of interest to high school teachers might be the oral history guidelines which could be modified for high school students.

"HOW TO DO IT" ARTICLES

Mazuzan, George T., and Gerald Twomey. "Oral History In The Classroom." The Social Studies 68 (1977): 14-19.

The authors included specific elements of what makes "good" oral history and applications for the classroom in this article. They encouraged teachers to give optional family history assignments using oral history interviews and recommended that entire classes work together using oral history to research something in the community. Vaguely implied was that tape recording and transcription were not necessary for school assignments but Mazuzan and Twomey did not mention on what basis students should be evaluated.

Mehaffy, George L. "Creating A Foxfire-Concept Magazine: Some Preliminary Considerations." The Social Studies 75 (1984): 13-17.

This article focused on the practical "nuts and bolts" of publishing an oral history project based on Eliot Wigginton's Foxfire concept. Mehaffy included important considerations for teachers contemplating this type of project. He warned that oral history projects take money and are often the target of criticism because of noisy classrooms and dis-ease with which students not always in school buildings during school hours are viewed. An interesting biographical sketch of teachers who have had the courage to take on oral history projects was included.

Mehaffy, George L., Thad Sitton, and O.L. Davis, Jr. Oral History In The Classroom. "How To Do It" Series 2 No. 8. Washington, D.C.: National Council For The Social Studies, 1979.

This teaching manual for oral history focused on how teachers can use oral history in a realistic and meaningful way. This booklet contained teaching ideas, instructional techniques, legal considerations, and practical applications. Transcribing tapes was described as time consuming, costly, difficult and unnecessary. Missing from this excellent resource for teachers was how to evaluate students when not requiring transcription of tapes.

Neuenschwander, John A. Oral History As A Teaching Approach A National Education Association Publication. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association Of The United States, 1976.

This handbook explained to teachers how to use oral history as a teaching tool in middle school through college. Practical application included various teaching approaches, guidelines for student interviews, ideas for research topics, sample release agreements, and examples of transcript and index formats. The dilemmas of using oral history when class time is limited and how to evaluate student interviews were not addressed.

Sitton, Thad. "Oral Life History: From Tape Recorder To Typewriter." The Social Studies 72 (1981): 120-26.

This article presented a rationale for using oral history in social studies classes. A "how to do it" section focused on finding suitable informants, interviewing techniques, tape analysis, transcription, and editing. Benefits of transcribing tapes were listed but problems related to tape transcription were not addressed.

OPINION ARTICLES

Carroll, Peter. "Teaching The New History: Thoughts For The 80's." Learning 14 (1985): 70-72.

Carroll emphasized that students should be assigned oral history as a way of teaching that history is not limited to battlefields and presidential terms. Carroll argued that by studying the history of everyday people students make connections and have a better understanding of the history traditionally taught in the classroom. This article was written for teachers yet Carroll failed to mention what grade level he had in mind for any of his suggested activities.

Daly, Richard F. "Oral History: Its Background, Definition, and Interview Types." Resources in Education, August, 1983. ED 237 380

Daly wrote about the history, definition and types of oral history for high school teachers. Large segments of this wordy treatise can be attributed to Daly's sources. Included are sweeping generalizations without any explanation or defense. The most worthwhile inclusion was a recommendation of Neuenschwander's Oral History As A Teaching Approach.

Haipt, Mildred. "Experiential Learning Techniques In Fieldwork." Improving College And University Teaching 30 (1982): 130-32.

Haipt wrote about the value of oral history as an alternative to library/lab work in an academic setting. She noted several qualities about oral history which were not evident in library research (e.g., voice inflection, body language, dress). This article was intended to convince college and university professors to assign oral history. Haipt cited the work of Glaser and Strauss to defend her theory that this type of experience was at least as valid as traditional library research as a tool of inquiry. Haipt's first hand experience conducting oral history convinced her to require such fieldwork in her college courses.

Kachaturoff, Grace, and Frances Greenebaum. "Oral History In The Social Studies Classroom." The Social Studies 72 (1981): 18-22.

Kachaturoff and Greenebaum wrote this article on the use of oral history in the social studies classroom based primarily on their combined 36 years of teaching experience. The enthusiasm of the authors was evident in the convincing arguments for the use of oral history. They challenged teachers to stretch beyond textbooks in an attempt to give meaning to the study of history. Ideas for topics included the exploration of family history, interviews of recent immigrants, folktales, songs & myths.

Mehaffy, George, and Thad Sitton. "Oral History: A Strategy That Works." Social Education 4 (1977): 378-81.

The authors included arguments for the use of oral history, along with strategies suggesting how teachers can apply oral history in the classroom, in this article. Fraught with difficulty were suggestions that, "...students record, transcribe, edit, and arrange family interviews...." This article reinforced the opinion that oral history is effective as a teaching tool but it was not helpful in practical classroom application.

Morrissey, Charles T. "Oral History: Tricks Of The Trade." International Journal Of Oral History 8 (1987): 91-94.

Morrissey, editor-in-chief of International Journal of Oral History, shared with readers the idea of incorporating a new column in IJOH entitled, "Tricks of the Trade." Included were quotes from oral historians serving as examples of the type of thing Morrissey had in mind for this column. While professional oral historians might appreciate this exchange of wisdom, it was too abstract for inexperienced high school students embarking on their first oral history project.

Nelson, Murry R., and H. Wells Singleton. "Using Oral History In The Social Studies Classroom." The Clearing House 49 (1975): 89-93.

This article recommended using oral history in the social studies classroom. A high school oral history project exploring Native American culture was included as an example of this teaching method. Particularly helpful for teachers was the warning that since oral history is not always accurate students must use it to supplement, not replace, written documents.

Wieder, Alan. "Oral History In The Classroom: An Exploratory Essay." The Social Studies 75 (1984): 71-74.

Wieder presented oral history as a way to make history classes exciting. He included suggestions for teachers of all grade levels, along with numerous "starting points." Wiedner failed to warn about drawbacks related to his suggestions and not all suggested activities were practical.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS AND ASSIGNMENTS IN SCHOOLS

Daniels, Elizabeth, et al., "The Intersection of Biography and History: The Vassar Class of 1935." International Journal of Oral History 9 (1988): 125-30.

This article was about an oral history class offered at Vassar College in 1985. It described the ideal oral history program. Highly motivated students researched the Vassar class of 1935. Resources for the students included readings and lectures on oral history, questionnaires, archival material, and the participation of 15 members of the class of 35 who attended class following interviews to share with students their perception of the recorded history. No mention was made of transcription of tapes.

Embry, Jessie L. "Teaching Oral History By Correspondence." International Journal Of Oral History 9 (1988): 139-45.

Embry shared the challenge of teaching a university correspondence course in oral history. He emphasized that teaching oral history was easier and more effective in a classroom setting. Even though only four students were enrolled in the course, Embry solved what he called the "time problem" of grading tapes by only allowing students to hand in their two best interviews. Included was a course outline with teaching objectives.

Fernekes, William R. "Student Inquiries About The Vietnam War." Social Education 52 (1988): 53-54.

This article focused on the value of oral history as a concrete way for students to learn about abstract concepts related to the Vietnam War. Fernekes provided a detailed lesson plan for teachers. It featured a valuable reminder that students need to be made sensitive to issues related to the Vietnam War and must apply that sensitivity when interviewing veterans about their personal experience. Fernekes claimed students learned to appreciate historical perspective from oral history interviews.

Hamlen, Bard Rogers. "The Carnegie Challenge Program At Jamaica Plain High School: Practice In School/Community Learning." Equity And Choice 2 (1986): 21-26.

This article described an oral history project at Jamaica Plain High School in Boston sponsored by a $3,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. English classes wrote a book about the school's alumni while history classes made a slide presentation and videotape of the Jamaica Plain community history. Two class periods a week were devoted to this project. Hamlen admitted that without the Carnegie grant and help of collaborating institutions this project would not have been possible.

Martin, Lois. "Oral History -- How To Mesh The Process And The Substance In U.S. History." The Social Studies 63 (1972): 322-26.

Martin described a practical oral history assignment. She required her high school students to write hypotheses about life during the Depression. Teams of students then interviewed a chosen number of informants about these hypotheses and presented their findings to the class in the form of a group presentation. Student testimony indicated this exercise was a positive class experience.

Mead-Mezzetta, Shirley. "Introducing Interviewing, A Sociology Tool, Into A United States History Class." Social Studies Review 23 (1983): 15-18.

Mead-Mezzetta presented an oral history project in which she required her students to work together to choose a research topic and write interview questions. A guest speaker was then invited to the class to be interviewed by the entire class. Following this practice run, students individually interviewed three to five informants. The completed project was a compilation of student essays based on research findings. Suggested topics included teen life in every decade between the 1920's and 1970's, a comparison between life at home and life in the service during WWII, and contrasting different perspectives on the 1960's.

Mehaffy, George L., and Thad Sitton. "Oral History Tells Its Own Story: The 'Loblolly' Project." The Social Studies 68 (1977): 231-35.

Mehaffy and Sitton interviewed Lincoln King, a teacher in Texas, about a magazine King's students published entitled Loblolly. This oral history project was presented as a successful way to use oral history in the classroom despite the fact that its description indicated it required a lot of class time. Mehaffy and Sitton mentioned that King taught history and journalism but did not state which class produced Loblolly.

Wigginton, Eliot, et al., "Oral History As A Teaching Tool." Oral History Review (1973): 30-35.

The section of this article written by Wigginton described the way students were trained to take part in the Foxfire magazine produced by Wigginton's classes and published by Doubleday. Reference to assistance of staff members, students who worked on the magazine for years, and students who transcribed ninety to one hundred pages from one interview indicated that this was a major project backed by a lot of resources not typically available to the average high school teacher.

Wigginton, Eliot. Sometimes A Shining Moment: The Foxfire: Experience. Garden City: Doubleday, 1985.

This book described Wigginton's educational philosophy based on twenty years experience as a high school teacher. Numerous anecdotes illustrated the frustration he experienced trying to teach English to uninterested students which led him to try an idea that evolved into the well known Foxfire magazine. This first-hand account provided insight into the commercially successful Foxfire magazine which is referred to in almost all literature available on the pedagogical use of oral history.

RESEARCH AND SURVEYS

Doka, Kenneth J. "Adolescent Attitudes And Beliefs Toward Aging And The Elderly." International Journal Of Aging And Human Development 22 (1985-1986): 173-187.

Doka set up a two day oral history program designed to research adolescent knowledge about aging and attitudes toward the elderly and the aging process. A control group of 12 - 16 year olds was compared to a self-appointed experimental group of students the same age. Research showed little statistical difference in adolescent attitudes and knowledge of elderly but did indicate youth were motivated to learn by contact with elderly.

Fernekes, William R. "The Uses And Abuses of Oral History As An Instructional Technique." Address. American Educational Research Association annual meeting. Montreal, Canada, April, 1983. ED 232 944

Fernekes presented this paper at the AERA annual meeting in 1983 on the use of oral history in the secondary classroom. His findings were based on 13 questionnaires returned in a survey of 40 schools. Fernekes quoted numerous sources and included arguments for the use of oral history as a method of teaching. He stressed that more research was needed on the pedagogic use of oral history.

Lanman, Barry A. "Oral History As An Educational Tool For Teaching Immigration And Black History In American High Schools: Findings And Queries." International Journal Of Oral History 8 (1987): 122-35.

Lanman researched the cognitive achievement, affective motivation, and instructional preference differences between oral history and traditional methods of instruction in the secondary social studies classroom. Findings based on cognitive tests and attitude surveys indicated a significant statistical difference (.05) between the cognitive gain of students using oral history compared to those taught by traditional methods. Lanman cautiously favored the use of oral history in the secondary classroom and recommended that more research be done in this area.

Neuenschwander, John, et al., "The Use Of Oral History In Teaching: A Report On The 1974 Survey." Oral History Review (1975): 59-67.

A section of this report dealt with oral history at the secondary level based on 21 returned questionnaires from 1,200 mailed in a survey. This unrepresentative sampling indicated that few teachers use oral history in general United States history courses. Problems cited included tight budgets and inordinate class time necessary for oral history projects. Educational objectives mentioned were developing basic social studies skills, convincing students that history is not only in textbooks, and introducing students to research methods.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pierce, Preston E. "Oral History: A Look At The Literature For Secondary Teachers." Resources In Education, April, 1984. ED 244 856

Pierce reviewed literature on oral history for secondary teachers in this bibliographic essay. He found it difficult to determine how widespread the use of oral history was at the high school level and noted that very little was available on the implementation of oral history for classroom use. Noted was that teacher evaluation of oral history assignments was rarely mentioned in any literature. Research in the field of oral history for educators was completely absent from this comprehensive guide.

Schipper, Stuart P. "Oral History: An Effective Means To Enhance Education In The Elementary Classroom." Resources In Education, May, 1983. ED 224 744

Fifty publications were included in this annotated bibliography on oral history in the elementary classroom written by Schipper. He concluded that oral history used at the elementary school level can attribute to cognitive - affective growth and recommended that teachers use oral history until research indicates it is not effective as a method of teaching.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

In summary, research indicated that oral history may result in greater cognitive gain than traditional methods of teaching. Students were motivated and gained confidence by working on oral history projects. Using oral history not only included minorities, but alleviated prejudice against them by exposing students to a greater number of positive minority role models.

Oral history has not been widely used in required high school history courses. Time, money, transcribing interviews, lack of teaching manuals, and the difficulties in evaluating students were cited as problems associated with using oral history as an instructional tool. Yet oral history projects do not have to be major productions to be successful.

It seems, therefore, that high school teachers should use oral history in required history courses. Especially students not interested in history deserve a chance to find the subject exciting and meaningful. Bard Rogers Hamlen said, "The most powerful resource available to the school remains ...its community and its alumni." (1986, p. 26).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author recommends that:

1. Research continue in the area of oral history in the secondary classroom and cognitive gain;

2. Teachers become acquainted with "how to" manuals such as "How To Do It" Series 2 No. 8. published by the National Council For The Social Studies, 1979;

3. High school teachers assign oral history in required history courses with the main objective focused on the process, not the final product;

4. Oral history assignments in required high school history courses be used to supplement, not replace, written documents;

5. College professors include a section on oral history in methods courses for students training to be teachers; and

6. Teachers who have incorporated oral history projects on a small scale in required high school history courses share their methods with the educational community.

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